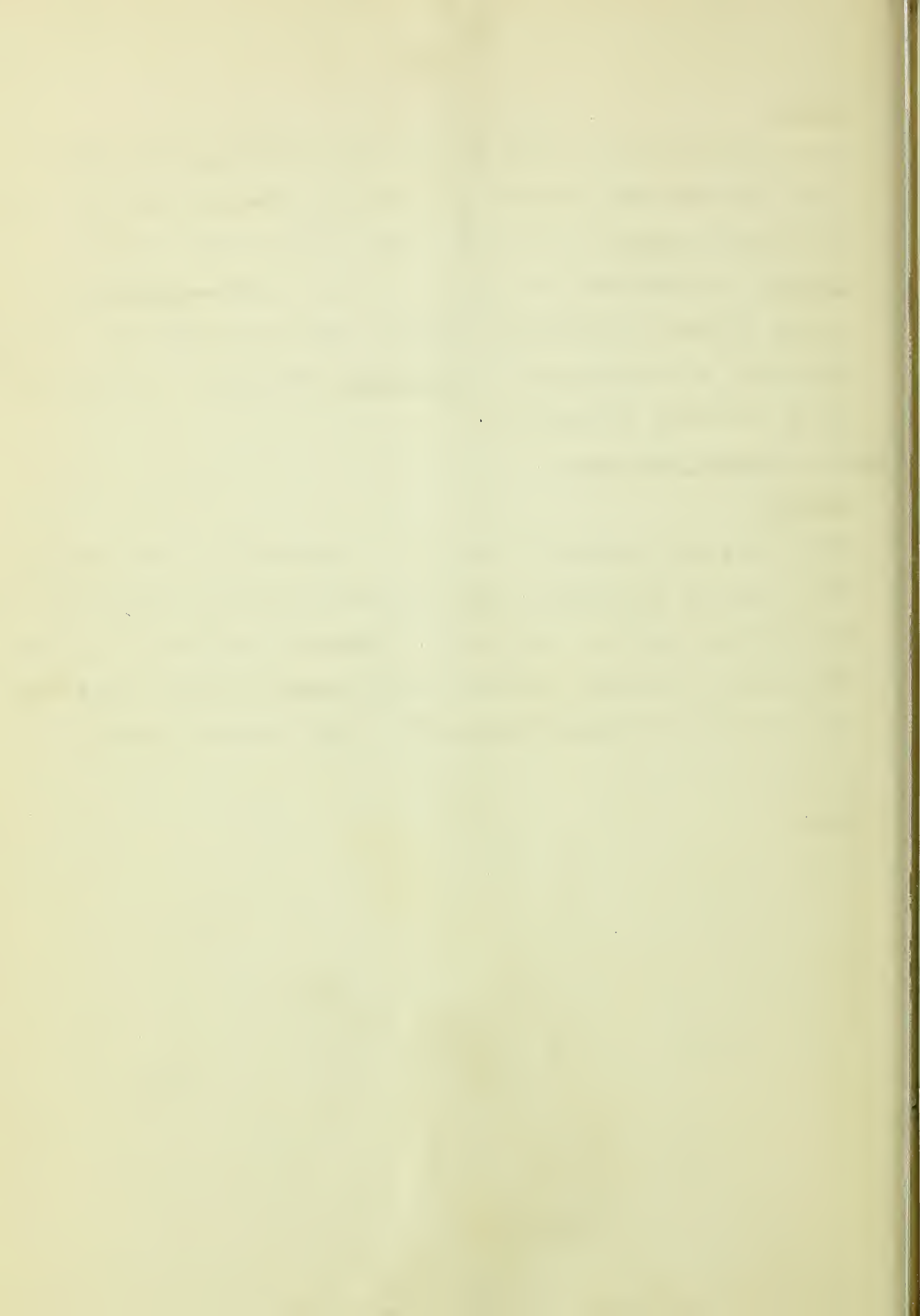


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F O R T U N E S W A S H E D A W A Y

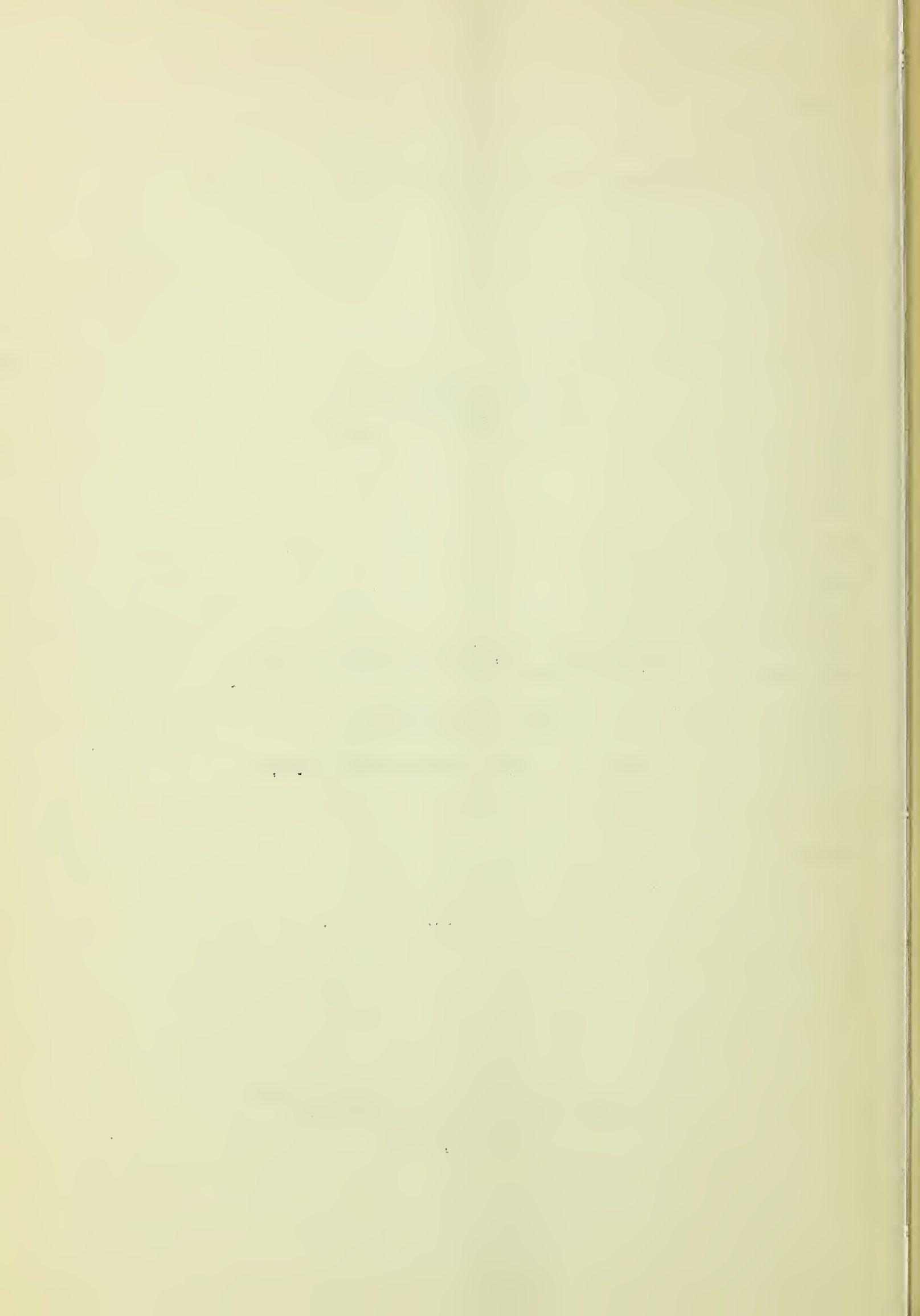
"FARMER COOPERATION
IN THE
BLACKLANDS OF TEXAS"

Broadcast No. 49 in a series of
discussions of soil conservation.

WLW, Cincinnati

April 1, 1939 6:45-7:00 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ALLISON

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ALLISON

The Blackland Prairie of Texas is a giant, wedge-shaped body of land extending from the Red River to near San Antonio. In this "black waxy" are 11 million acres of fertile prairie which once comprised the most productive large section of agricultural land in the state-- land often called "as fertile as the Valley of the Nile." The first settlers were ranchers, and little farming was done before 1850. Then came cotton, cotton, cotton! And in all of this black prairie there was no soil richer than that found along Elm Creek, in Bell, McLennan, Falls, and Milam counties...but as the extension of railroads opened up new markets for the Blacklands' cotton, settlers poured into the area to rip up the sod and to plant "White gold." To Elm Creek in 1886 came George F. Winkelman...

SOUND: Team of horses, harness rattling, wheels creaking...

WINKLEMAN

Whoa, Red, whoa there! Whoa.

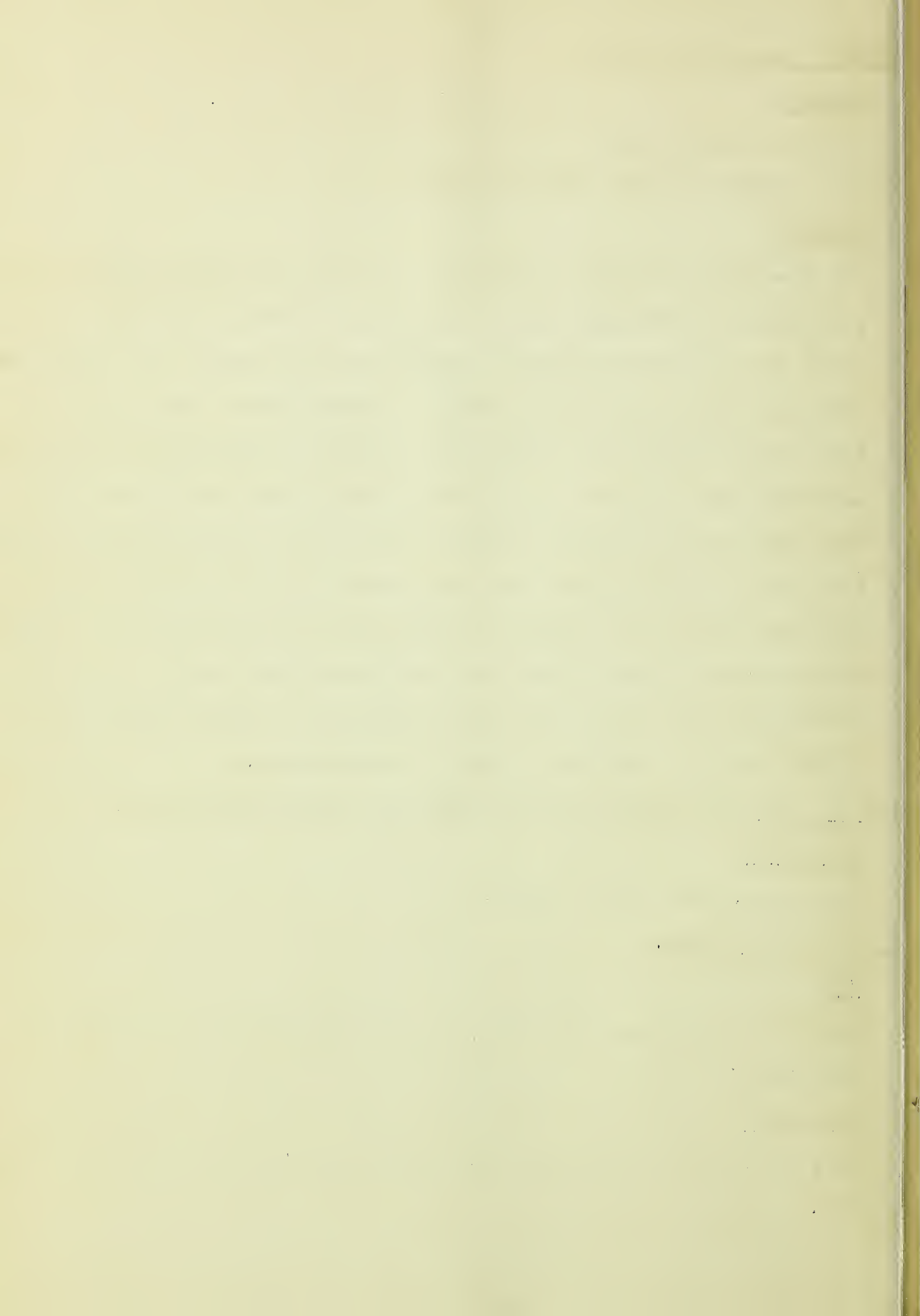
SOUND: Team stops.

BEN

Look at this grass, dad! Why, the bluestem reaches the hubs of the wagon!

WINKLEMAN

Yes, Ben, it's a fine prairie. This meadow's as fine as any I ever saw.



BEN

And look how black and rich the dirt is. Why, I bet it would make a bale of cotton to the acre. Guess you're going to plow it up, aren't you? They're paying good prices for cotton.

WINKLEMAN

This is some of the best land I have. That's one reason I haven't plowed it up and put it into cultivation. I'm sorta saving it for you boys.

BEN (excitedly, and with pride)

For us? Gee! That'll be fine, dad. I can see cotton growing here higher than this grass...and corn higher'n your head.

WINKLEMAN

Wait a minute, Ben...wait a m i n u t e. Some day you're going to plow up this land and I want you to remember what I tell you today.

BEN

What's that, dad?

WINKLEMAN

Don't plow up all this meadow land to plant cotton and corn. Leave some strips of grass in your cultivated fields.

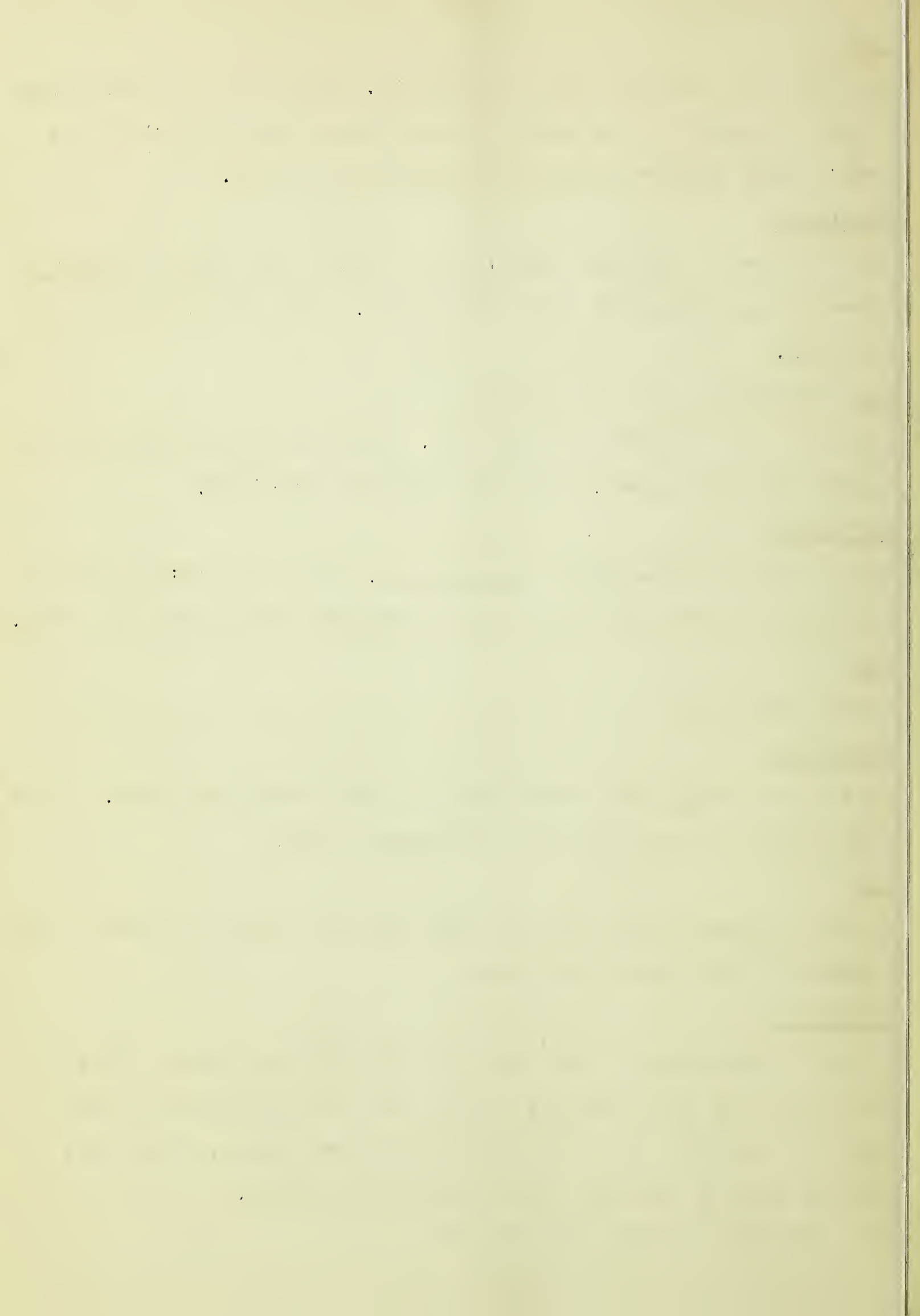
BEN

Strips of grass in the fields? Why, there's plenty of grass in the bottoms for the horses and cows.

WINKLEMAN

It isn't the grass, or the hay, that I'm thinking about. This is good land, but it's sloping. It'll wash just like some of that land that has been in cultivation for several years. Even now, I can see some of the soil washing toward Elm Creek.

ORGAN: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.



ALLISON

But not all cotton farmers in the Blacklands of Texas had the foresight of old George F. Winkleman. Up and down hill rows gave erosion its start. Soil and water poured into the creeks. Elm Creek went out of its banks. Productive bottom lands were covered with water, crops buried in silt. Cotton yields dropped more than one half! But Ben Winkleman carried with him the thoughts of conservation instilled by his father. And in 1915...

SOUND: Horses trotting, pulling buggy.

BEN

Whoa! Pull up, there!

SOUND: Horses come to stop, rattling harness.

BEN

Hey, Sam! Come over to the fence a minute.

SAM (fading in)

Hello, Ben. Where you headed, all dressed up--and driving your best trotters. Got a new buggy, haven't you?

BEN

Yeah, got the buggy last week. It's a beaut, isn't it?

SAM

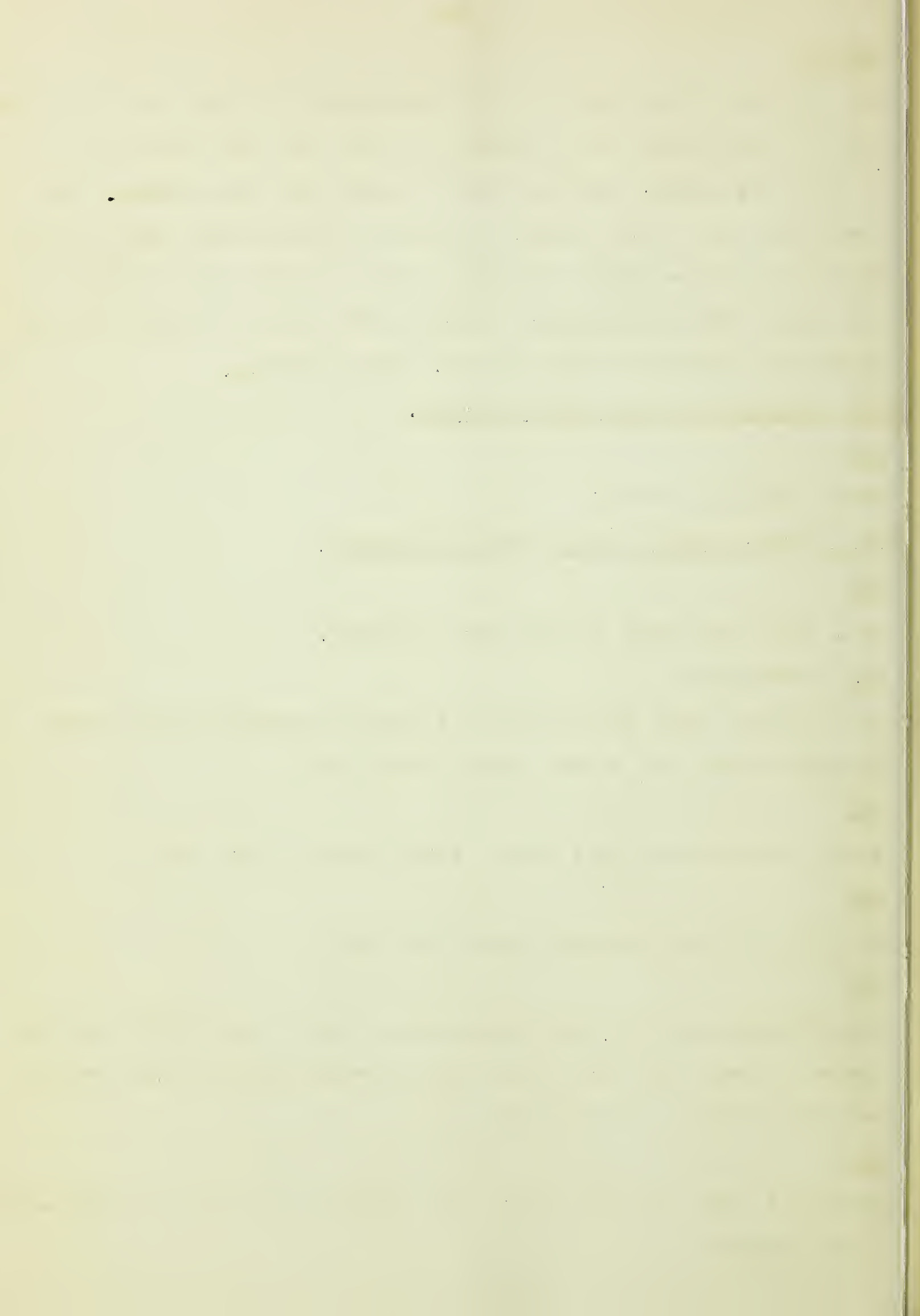
Sure is. But what was you wanting me for?

BEN

Why, I wanted you to come along with me over to old "Doc" Monroe's place. I hear that he's built some terraces and I'm going over to see 'em. Want to come along?

SAM

Terraces? Ben, are you crazy? Who wants to tear up his field with those things?



BEN

Well, I...

SAM

My county agent, Joe Chaney, has been talking to me about terraces, and I'm not...

BEN

You ought to look into...

SAM

I'd be perfectly willing for him to help me build some dams on my fields--but terraces! Not me! Not by a long shot. They crawl over the field too much.

BEN

Well, suit yourself, Sam. But as for me, well, I'm going to put a stop to those washes in my field. If terraces are working on Doc Monroe's place, they'll work on mine.

ORGAN: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.

ALLISON

True to his word, Ben Winkleman terraced his fields--and so did others. Over in Milam County at the same time, Ed McAtee was also thinking about conservation...

SOUND: Book closes with a bang.

J.F.

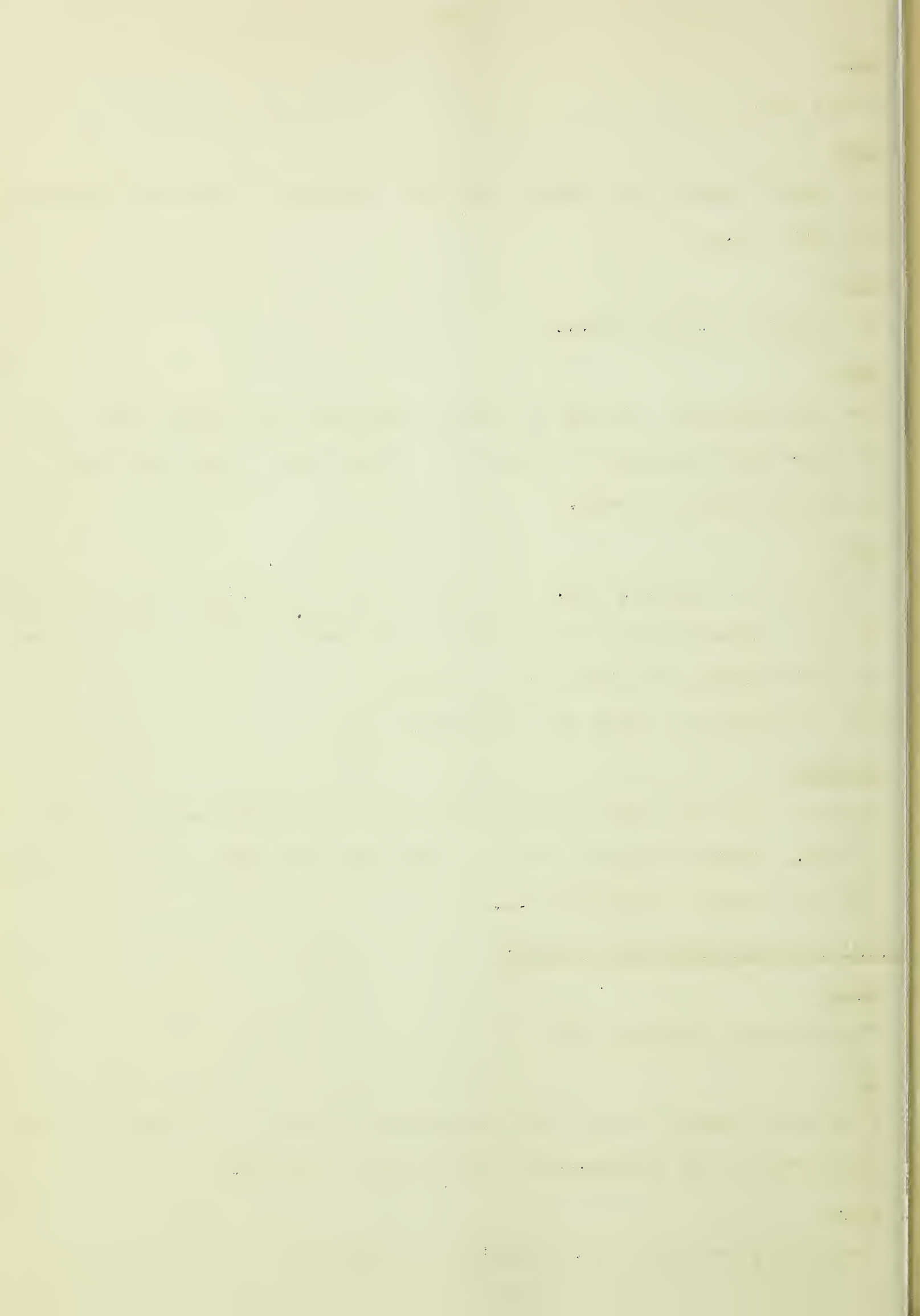
What are you reading, Ed?

ED

I've been reading just about everything I can get my hands on that deals with good farming--and with erosion control.

J.F.

Yes, you sure have, son. What's it about now?



ED

Terraces. Do you remember when I was just a boy, I came out in the field and wanted to know why you were plowing that ditch across the field?

J.F.

Yes, sure I remember. You were trying to learn all you could about farming, even then. And remember what I told you?

ED

Yes, you said you were plowing that ditch and throwing the dirt up behind it, so you could catch the run-off water and carry it off to the fence row.

J.F.

....and keep the water from washing all the way down the slope and carrying my soil with it.

ED

Well, dad, you had the right idea when you built those ditches and dams--but I've got a better one.

J.F.

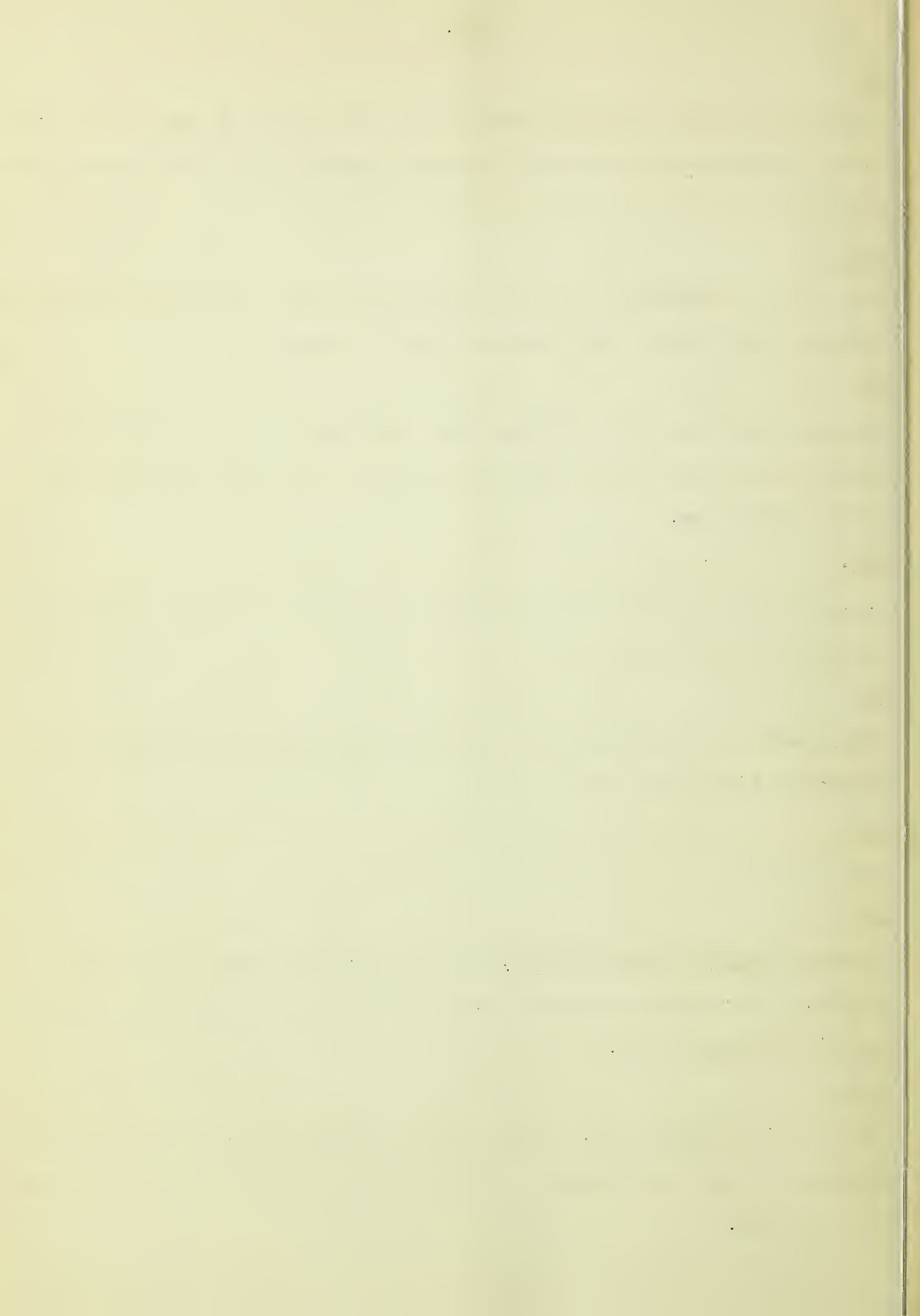
What's that?

ED

Terraces built on the contour, not on straight lines across the slopes. Your ditches washed and ate back into the fields. They weren't drained right.

J.F.

Maybe you're right, son. Maybe you're right. You've been doing a mighty good job of farming for me, and I know you'll do what's best for the land.



ED

Well, I know one thing, dad. When I get land of my own the very first plow I use will be a terracing plow!

ORGAN: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.

ALLISON

In 1933, a federal erosion control demonstration project was established on Elm Creek--a demonstration of how erosion could be controlled effectively by the coordinated use of modern farming practices--contour rows, strip cropping, terracing, cover crops, and pasture ridges and furrows. Leaders in other communities saw the work. They went over the watershed on foot, by wagon, on horseback, and in automobiles. Today, in North Elm alone, nearly 30,000 acres in one solid block of 165 farms are arranged for soil conservation--through farmer cooperation. There are other treated farms in North Elm and many in Big Elm watershed. And men working like this--together--have a new spirit of optimism toward agriculture. Men like Ben Winkleman...

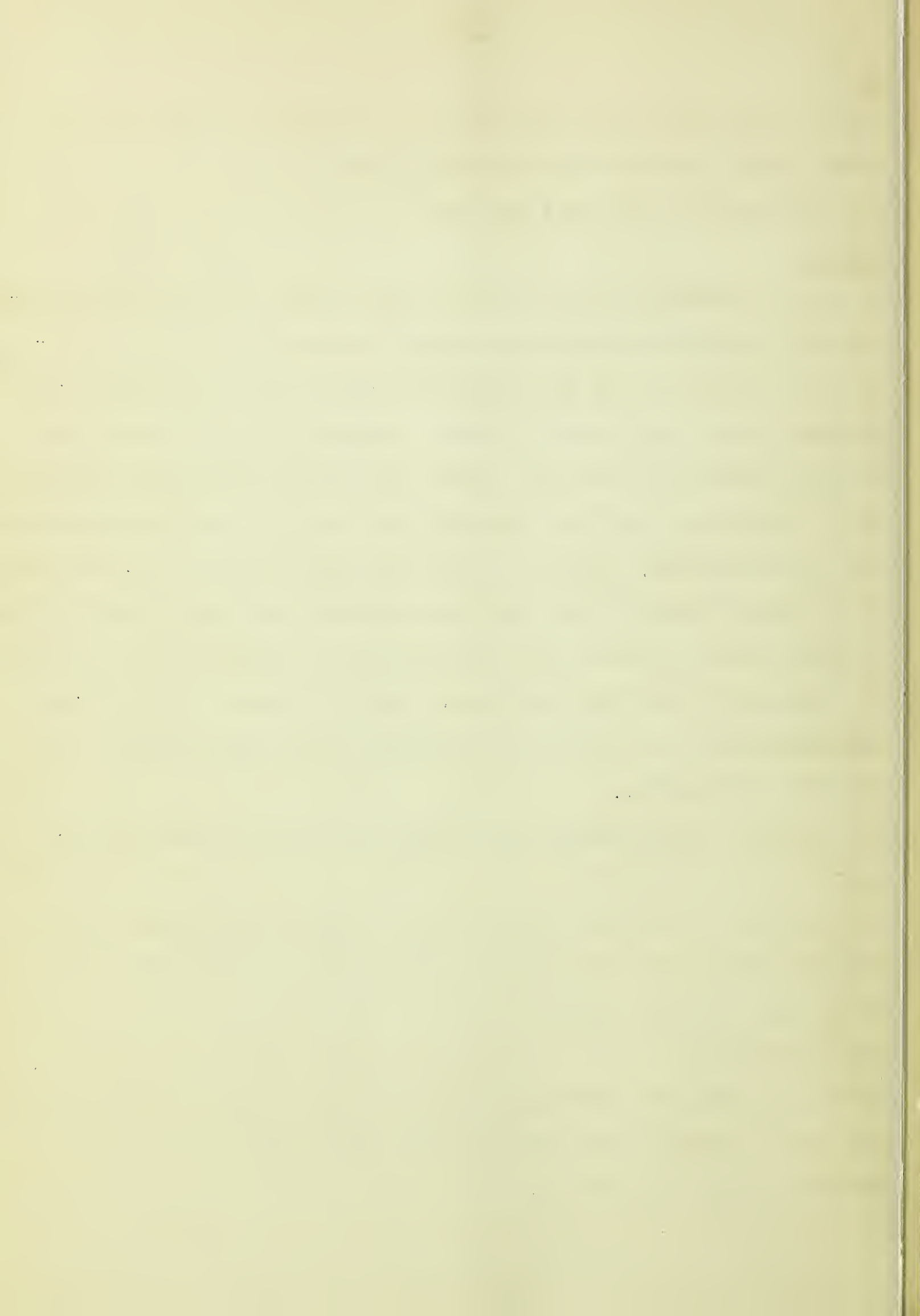
SOUND: Tractor motor racing as it pulls seed drill, then idling...

SAM

Hello, Ben. Looks like you're working mighty hard today. Don't believe I ever saw a fellow run a drill all over his field like you. What are you doing?

BEN (chuckling)

Just a job dad once told me I'd have to do. I guess I sorta forgot all about leaving grass strips in the field until this erosion control project came along.



SAM

Well, it sure looks like a funny kind of farming to me--but I'm doing a lot of things on my farm I used to swear I wouldn't do--terracing, strip cropping, contour cultivation, pasture ridging.

BEN

Yes, and it's going to stop the washing. You know, Sam, I guess my dad knew a whole lot more about this soil than I did.

ORGAN: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU.

ALLISON

A lot of changes in farming methods have been made in the Blacklands of Texas since old George Winkleman came there in 1886--changes that saw crop production soar, and fall. And now, a new star is in its ascendancy, a star of proper land use, as Texas farmers take on new hope--through cooperation toward soil conservation.

ORGAN: THE EYES OF TEXAS ARE UPON YOU. (Up and out.)

ALLISON

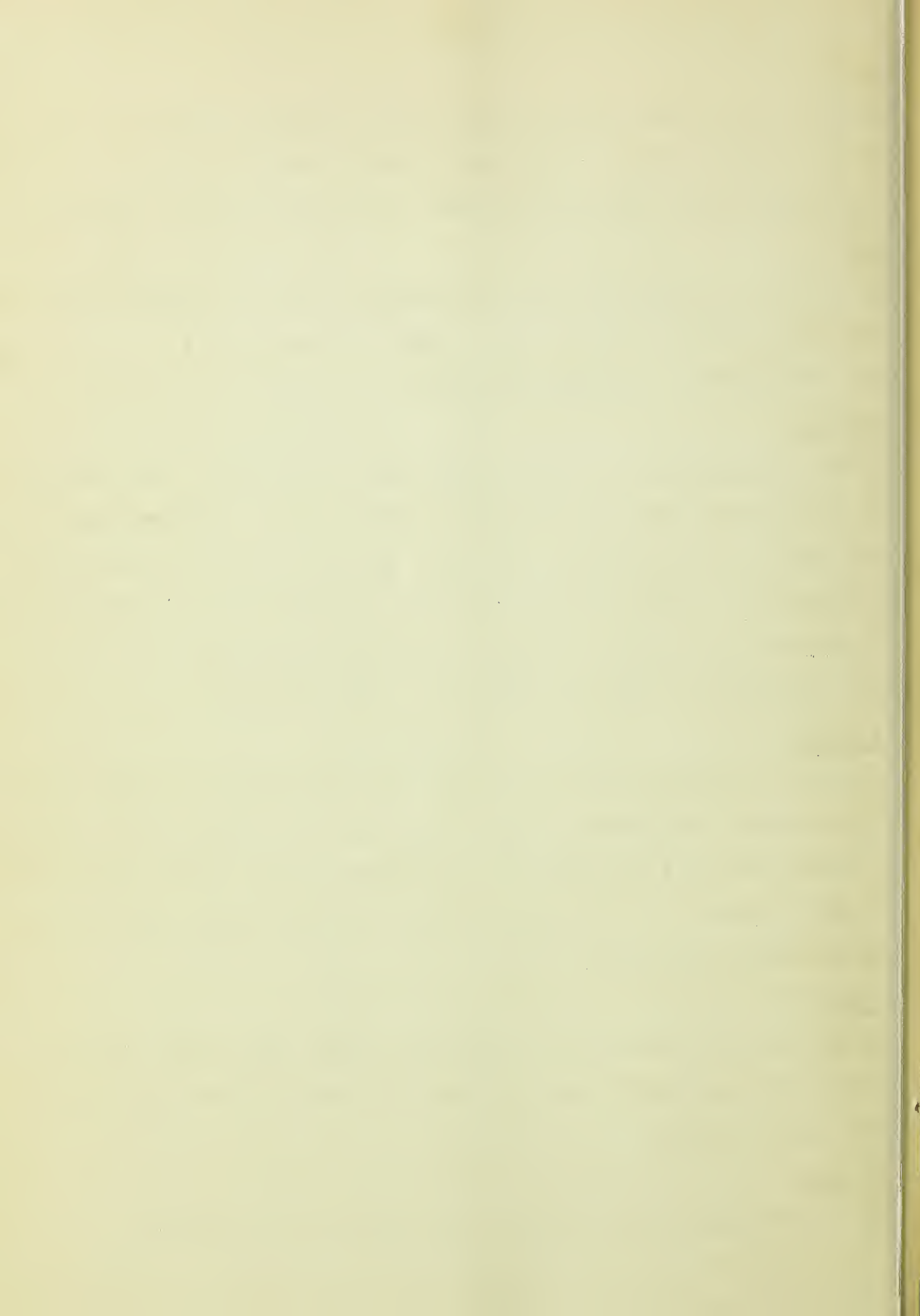
And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and to Ewing Jones. Ewing, I don't believe I ever heard of any place in the United States where nearly 30,000 acres in a solid block have been given complete erosion control treatment.

JONES

As far as we've been able to find out, Paul, this large block of conservation-treated farms in North Elm Creek is the only one of its kind so large.

ALLISON

And who's responsible for this fine piece of cooperation?



JONES

It would be a hard job to single out individuals, so many farmers had a hand in putting it over. A few I could mention would be the veteran George Banzhaf, county agent in Milam County; and Dan Clinton, former agent in Falls County. The list of farmers would be a long one and I'd hate to slight anyone.

ALLISON

It's certainly an impressive story, and it shows that farmers can and will work cooperatively.

JONES

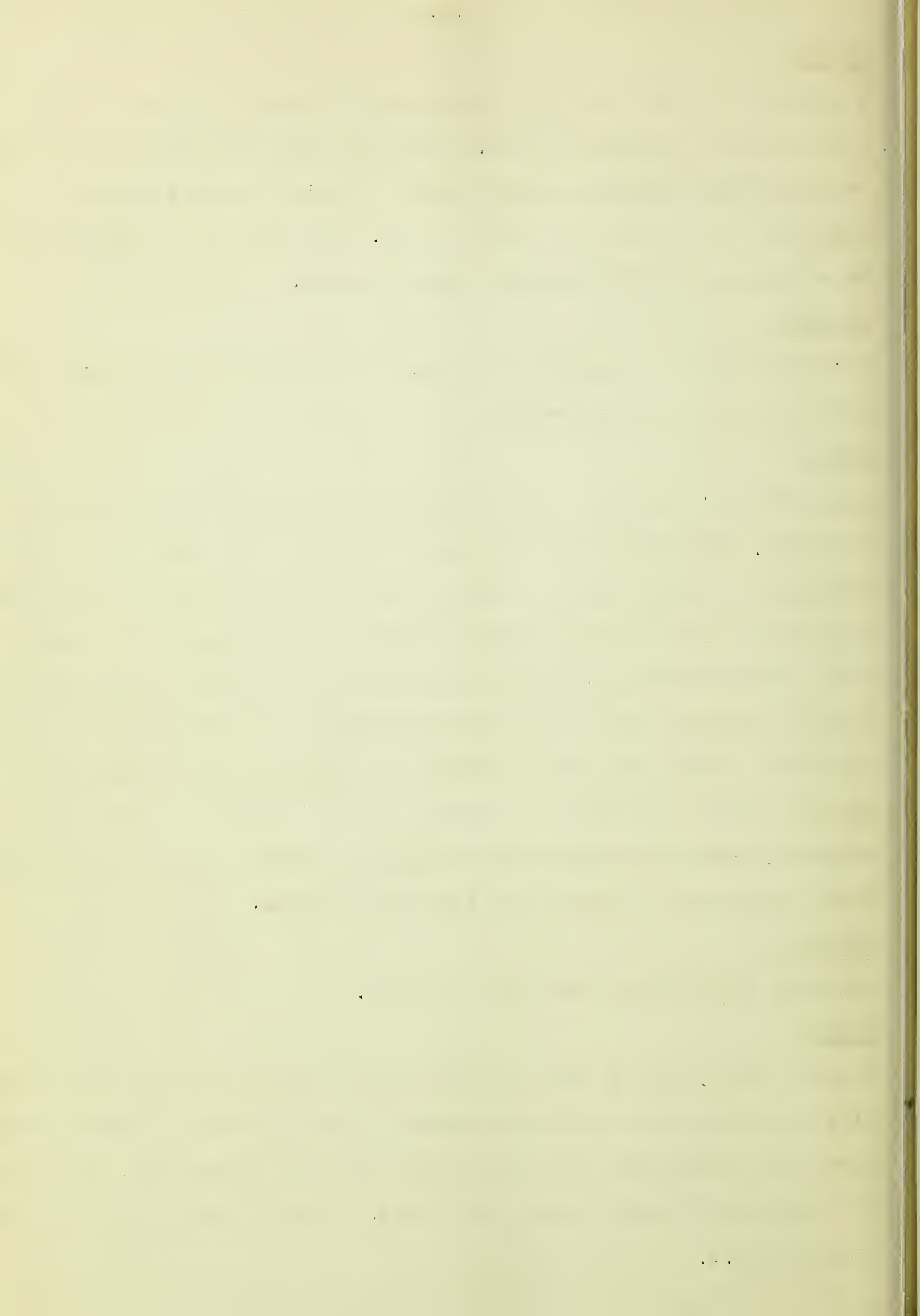
Yes, but you'd have to see the treated watershed to appreciate it properly. The modern farming picture in the North Elm Creek area during the regular cropping season is a beautiful sight to behold. Standing on some of the highest points in the area, you can look out over conservation-treated farms extending as far as the eye can reach. Terraces stretch in unbroken lines across the slopes. Rows of cotton follow the contour across the slopes, and interspersed between these row crops are erosion control strips of small grain, sorghum, Hubam clover or bluestem grass. Outlet channels and roadside ditches are covered with lush green grass.

ALLISON

The work just spread from farm to farm.

JONES

That's right. Let me give you an idea of how it spread. After the first work was done on the watershed of Big Elm Creek, farmers from North and South Elm, and Little Elm, saw these practices. Men like Ed Hoelscher, Bartle Crenan, and W. M. Falkner, began talking among themselves...



HOELSCHER

Those fellows over on Big Elm are sure doing a lot of work with those government people with the Soil Conservation Service. I heard that about 300 farmers are putting in erosion control systems.

CRENAN

And we need help just as bad, Ed. Our soil's washing, and the gullies are eating into our fields.

FALKNER

Bartle, I heard that we can get help if, say, 90 percent of the North Elm farmers agree to cooperate.

CRENAN

Why 90 percent?

HOELSCHER

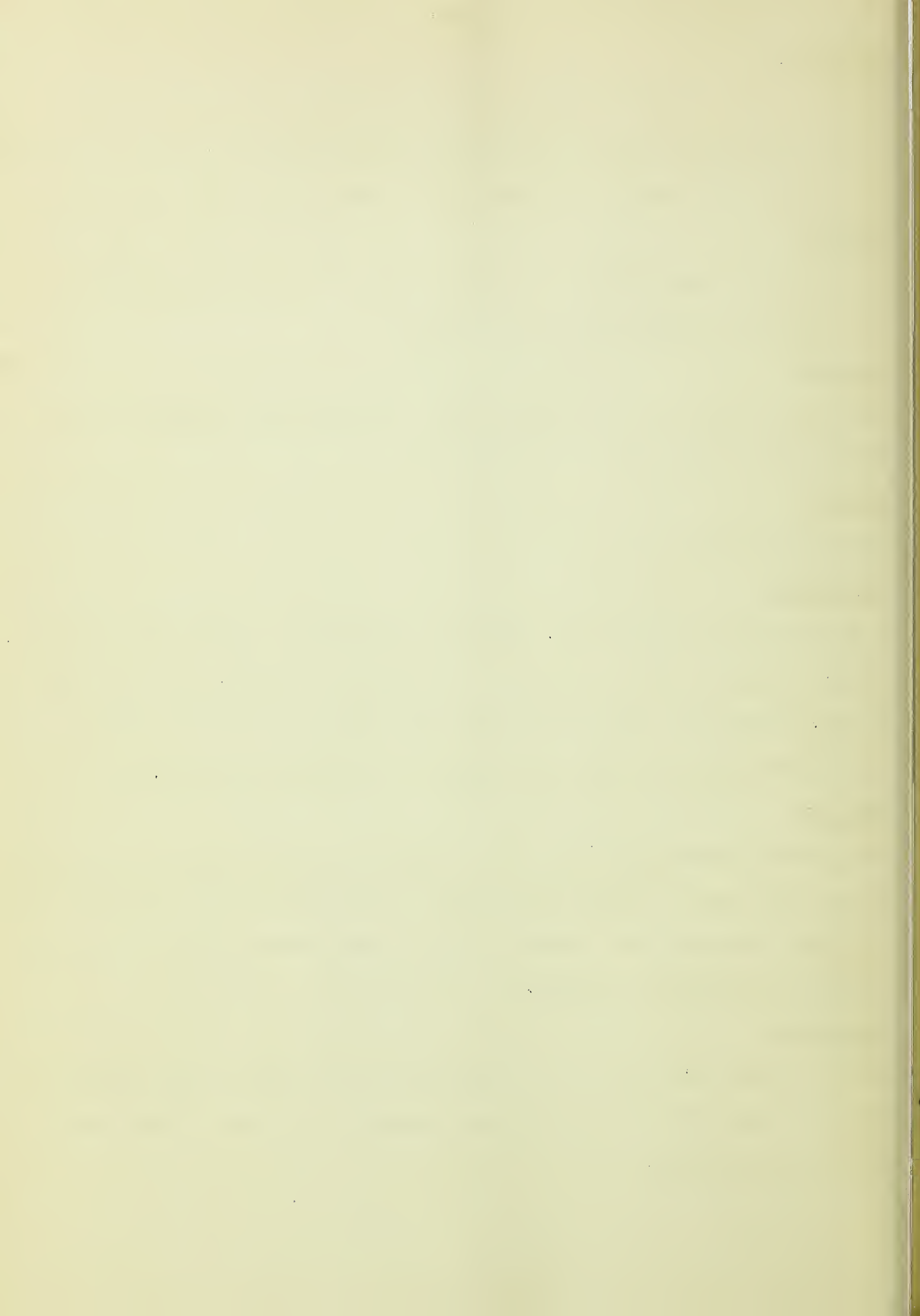
I think I know the answer. Erosion control is a watershed proposition. If the fellow at the top of the slope doesn't farm on the level, water from his fields will rush down on the lower farm, break terraces, and bury his neighbor's crops with dirt.

FALKNER

And another thing, you've got to have a protected drain for terrace water, and some of these slopes are so long that the water will have to drain through maybe three or four farms before it can be turned loose in a creek or pasture.

HOELSCHER

It's a cinch we've got to do something about this erosion problem. I've noticed a lot of white spots showing up on the fields where the topsoil's gone.



CRENAN

Reckon we could get 90 percent of the North Elm farmers to use erosion control like they have over on the Big Elm?

FALKNER

We can sure try.

HOELSCHER

And we'll do it, too. (fade)

JONES

That's how it went, Paul, and you know how they succeeded. Those farmers in Texas are working together. The farms were planned without regard to farm boundaries. Within that solid block of 29,000 acres there are 54 cooperative terrace systems serving 135 farms. Thirty-four cooperative terraces cross two or more farms without a break. And as a result of this block cooperation, flood hazards have been lessened.

ALLISON

The land does play an important part in flood control.

JONES

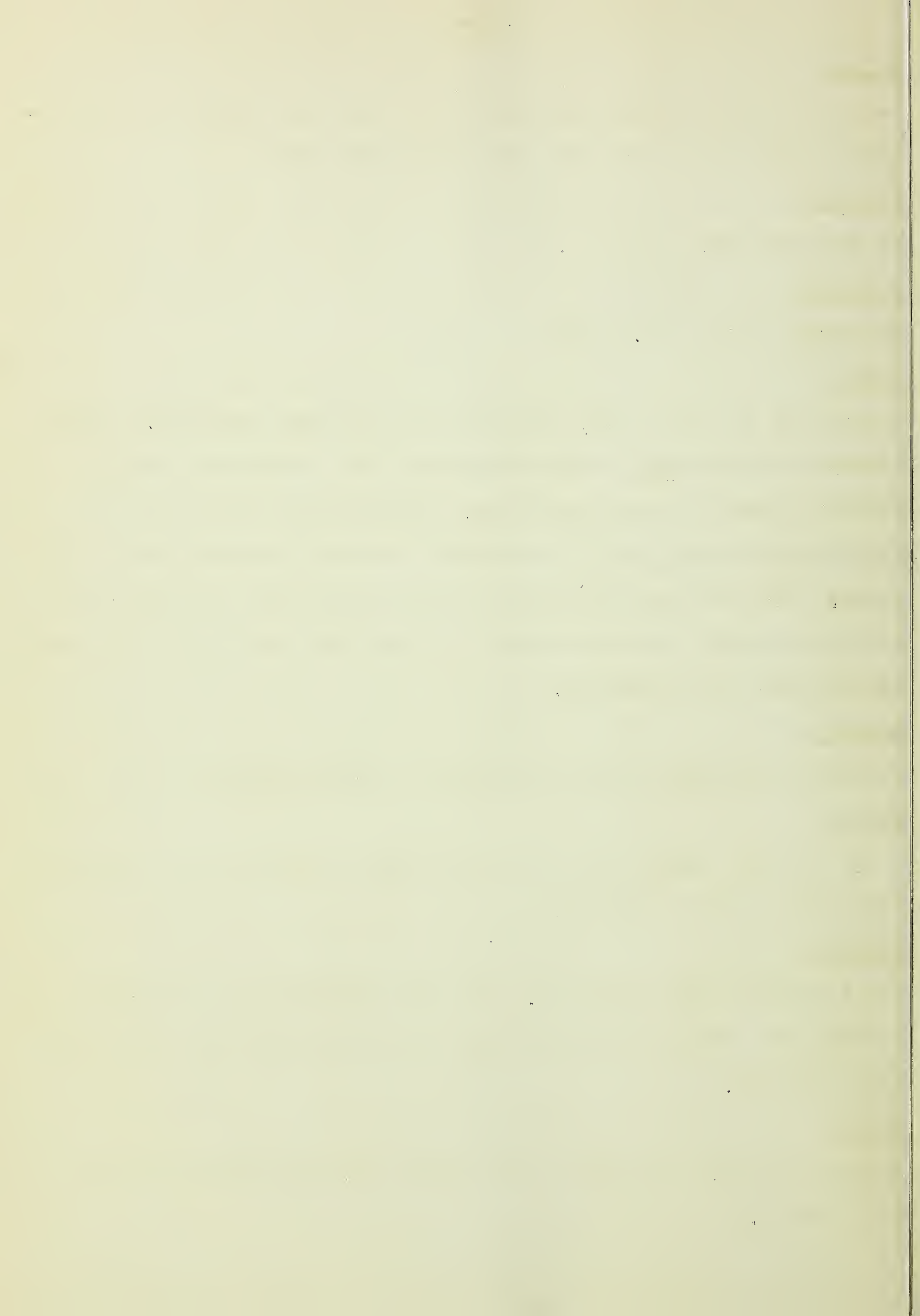
Yes, it does. That's pointed out in the new illustrated bulletin, "The Land in Flood Control."

ALLISON

Oh, I remember that bulletin. Its cover includes a photograph showing how contour rows hold back the water, and allow it to soak into the soil.

JONES

That's the one. It explains the direct relation between floods and farming.



ALLISON

And where may copies be obtained?

JONES

Paul Allison, I'm surprised! You know good and well that they may be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. And with that, goodbye until next week.

ALLISON

Goodbye, Ewing, and next week we'll hear about _____.
_____. If you would like a copy of the
bulletin, "The Land in Flood Control," send a letter or a penny
postcard to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio.

SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ALLISON

This story of farmer cooperation in Texas was presented through the cooperation of the regional offices of the Soil Conservation in Dayton, Ohio, and Fort Worth, Texas. Fortunes Washed Away is a studio presentation of the agriculture department of the Nation's Station.

